The influence of social networks and community on party preference in Flanders, Belgium

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1. Introduction

Although voting is a very private and individual act, social networks directly influence the choice made. Ideally, an informed voter casts a vote on the party which is closest to his or her vision on society. These underlying values are socially inherited during childhood and adolescence from different actors such as parents, peers, school and/or media. In this paper, we are interested in the extent to which environment exerts an influence over party preference. Environment here is seen as both the social network one is embedded in and the geographical context. Instead of focussing on the role of the individual in his party preference, we examine if the size and composition of one's social network, and the municipality of residence, plays an additional, constraining role on party preference. Although a lot of the research using the social network perspective looks at the political homogeneity of the networks, in this analysis we use network indicators as measures of structural social capital.

2. Theoretical Framework

Previous research on social networks and voting has stressed the fact that people are embedded in networks of people having similar political opinions (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954; Huckfeldt & Sprague 1992). In our research, we restrict the analysis to purely structural aspects of social networks, following the approach of Huckfeldt & La Due Lake (1998). We consider social ties as the structural aspects of social capital, and we want to investigate to what extent social capital enhances the likelihood of preferring one party over another.

2.1 Social ties

Social relations lie at the heart of all social sciences. A specific interest in the composition of one's social ties can already be found in work on group affiliations in the early days of sociology. According to Simmel (1955), in pre-modern society one's web of social relations was embedded in concentric circles such as family, neighbourhood and workplace. Kinship and locality determined one's social relations to a large extent, and one couldn't create ties to a different social circle without being member of an embedded smaller one. In modern society this wasn't the case anymore, and the individual was seen as the one connecting different

spheres of social life. One's family, friends circle, colleagues and religious affiliation are loosely connected, and not completely determined by each other.

More contemporary approaches to social ties want to examine which kind of ties contribute most to social cohesion, as fragmentation of society and is seen as the cause of many problems, such as crime, isolation and suicide. From this perspective, two types of ties can be discerned: bridging and bonding ties.

2.1.1 Bonding Ties

One of the general laws of social networks is that birds of a feather flock together (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954). People with similar backgrounds, living in the same region, with similar opinions, have a larger chance of knowing each other than people with different backgrounds, living in different regions, with different opinions. The observation that similarity breeds connection, has been documented in a number of intimate life domains such as marriage, friendship, residency, religious affiliation… (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001). The social capital that is generated in these homogenous networks is often coined bonding social capital. Bonding capital could be traced back to the kind of solidarity Durkheim (1915) associated with participation in community rituals, for him the key to social integration. The solidarity is only extended to group members, and it entails mostly emotional support, and focuses on the needs and interests of group members. We can see the bonding ties as support networks, or "those social interactions and relationships that provide individuals with actual assistance or with a feeling of attachment to a person or a group that is perceived as caring and loving" (Hobfoll & Stokes, 1988). Social support has been shown to have an important direct relation with both higher subjective wellbeing and better mental and physical health (Ensel & Lin, 1991; Berkman & Syme, 1979). Next to that, social support functions as a buffer to various stressors and has an indirect effect as well (LaRocco, House , & French, 1980; Cobb, 1976). Conceptually social support can be divided in a number of different aspects : emotional, instrumental, informational support.

These strong ties are formed within the groups and communities, which already gives a hint at the problems associated with the bonding capital: groups and communities are often exclusive. Furthermore, since it occurs in homogenous groups, it can be parochial and inward-looking, and the tight bonds of trust may prevent members from reaching their full potential (Portes & Landolt, 1996). Thick trust is generated by intensive, regular contact between people, making social control possible (Coleman, 1988). The expectation of reciprocity inherent to social capital also means that those who will not be able to repay, will not be

granted favours. Burt (2000), characterises the kind of social capital generated by networks were everyone knows everyone, also known as network closure, information flows very easily, and social norms are strong, as social cohesion.

2.1.2 Bridging ties

Next to strong ties within groups, ties between social groups play an important role as generators of social capital (Woolcock, 1998). Granovetter (1973) states in a seminal study that the strength of a tie is inversely related to the homogeneity of both parties involved. These weak ties link members of different social groups, and are therefore the basis for integration in contemporary society (Newton, 1997). Building bridges between different circles can also be beneficial for the individual. These holes in the social structure create opportunities for the ones building the bridges, or in other words, the network brokers (Burt, 1992). If one has access to different kinds of networks, one can control the flow of information from one network to another. The most valuable network resources are the ones who come from a different relatively closed network. Furthermore linking ties also prevent the negative outcomes of too much "social glue", like prejudice towards others, and widen the perspective through contact with others (Allport, 1954). Since diversity in society is growing at a very fast rate, bridging social ties are seen as an effective tool to handle these differences. Since diversity is a relatively vague term, it may be helpful to distinguish between different forms of bridging ties. Identity bridging ties are links between culturally defined group differences such as ethnicity, sexual preference, religion, etc., while status bridging ties are associated with the socio-economic stratification of society (Wuthnow, 2002). It is clear that the conceptual division between bonding and bridging ties gives insight into the mechanisms of social capital generation. Both are necessary, or as Putnam (2000) states that bonding capital is good to "get by", but bridging capital allows one to "get ahead".

2.1.3 Social ties and politics

In general the approach we use leans heavily on the seminal work about the influence of context and networks on political behaviour and attitudes, "The social logic of politics" by Zuckerman (2005).

From the political communication perspective, Huckfeldt et al. (1995) noted that political opinion transmission depends to a large extent on the microenvironment, or the social networks one has. Those who are more politically integrated, also have more chances for extensive social interaction, and are more likely to experience the larger climate of political

opinions. Previous research has illustrated that social capital plays a significant role, over both human capital and organizational involvement, in political participation (Huckfeldt & La Due Lake 1998).

2.2 Context

Although socialisation literature is all about context, geography is rarely added to the analysis of electoral systems of proportional representation. It is widely documented in studies on party preferences in majority systems (e.g. Gainsborough 2001; Johnston & Pattie 2006; Walks 2005). We are interested in the municipality as context, since it can be expected that the municipality context has some influence on party preference. Living in a municipality that has a large immigrant population, could trigger sensitivity for immigration issues that are not so tangible in a rural village.

A second point is that presence is a first condition for social contact (Blau, 1977), or stated differently, "personal network are the result of individual choices made within the constraints of the context" (Fischer et al,.1977 in Mollenhorst, Völker & Flap, 2008). We can see the municipality as this context that constrains or opens up the possibilities for social ties.

3. Data & Contextualisation:

3.1 The data

Since we want to test these hypotheses on the Flemish population, a complete network design is impossible, but egocentric network measures in surveys can provide robust and representative information (Marsden, 1990). We will use data from the Social Cohesion Indicators Flanders (SCIF) Survey. The SCIF-survey is a representative survey of respondents in Flanders between 18 and 85 years old. The SCIF survey was conducted in the northern autonomous region of Flanders, with 6,162,000 inhabitants or 58 per cent of the total Belgian population. A face-to–face interview methodology was chosen since this method of interview allows for longer interviews and more reliable answers on complicated measurement instruments. In total, 2,080 respondents participated in the survey. The interviews were carried out between the April and July 2009.

The survey was designed specifically to analyse the impact of community level characteristics on individual quality of life outcomes. To select the respondents, two-stage cluster sampling

was used. First, groups of communities were identified that differ minimally within and maximally between groups. This cluster analysis was performed using community level indicators of population density and mobility, industrial production, economic performance and demographic indicators[1]. From the resulting clusters, 40 municipalities were randomly drawn, with their selection chances dependent on their population figure. This procedure was used to ensure a sufficient variation of relevant indicators on the community level. In a second phase, a simple random sample of inhabitants born between 1924 and 1991, living in the selected municipalities, was drawn from the official national registry (including both Belgian citizens and foreign nationals). Overall, the survey obtained a response rate of 54 per cent, which can be considered as average for this kind of research in a Belgian context. A response analysis indicated that respondents are representative for the population of these 40 municipalities, with no significant differences between participants and the population with regard to age and gender. The resulting dataset, in sum, includes information on 2,080 respondents, nested in 40 distinct municipalities. This nested design allows us to test the impact of community level variables on individual outcomes in a methodologically correct manner, with sufficient cases both on the first (individual) and second (community) observation level (SCIF 2009).

To have a parsimonious measure of variables that can explain differences between communities in Flanders, we did a factor analysis on 18 important structural indicators (see also Hooghe, Vanhoutte & Bircan 2009). A wide range of demographic, socio-economic, criminological and spatial planning indicators are used (see factor matrix in appendix). Although the scores were calculated for all 308 Flemish municipalities based on data from 2005, in the analyses we evidently only use the scores for the municipalities that were included in the SCIF-survey. The factoranalysis provides 5 Factors, that comprise 90.29% of the total variance[2]. The dimensions are solid indicators on the municipality level for urbanization, population mobility and immigration, population density, economic wellbeing and the ageing of the population.

[1] The Flemish region is divided in 308 municipalities, with on average ca. 20,000 inhabitants. The municipalities have a large degree of autonomy with regard to housing, social affairs, environment, land use, poverty reduction, etc.

[2] For an overview of the indicators used and the factormatrix: see appendix

Table 1: Frequencies and characteristics of municipality-level variables

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Urbanity	40	1.675	3.797	-0.355	13.912
Population Mobility	40	0.034	0.697	-0.631	2.698
Population density	40	0.098	0.801	-1.057	2.903
Economic Wellbeing	40	-0.249	0.865	-2.236	2.660
Ageing of the population	40	-0.015	0.888	-2.195	3.517

3.2 Political Landscape

As a consociational democracy, a typical feature of the political context is that it is compose out of many parties, which are represented proportionally if they have a larger share of the vote than the 5% threshold.. In the elections closest to our time of data-collection, the regional elections of 2009, seven different parties were represented. A second typical feature is that voting is obligatory in Belgium. In our analysis, we will take into account the 4 largest parties in our survey, excluding those that did not reach 10% of our sample excluding the missings. These parties are the centre-oriented Christian-democrats (CD&V), the center-left social-democratic party (sp.a), the center-right liberal party (OpenVLD) and the extreme right anti-immigrant Vlaams Belang (VB). These four parties can be seen as the ones that have dominated politics in the last 20 years. With the exception of VB, they were all in a government coalition for at least two terms.

We will analyse the party preference in a binary way, looking only at the respondents who have a party preference, which still is 85% of our sample. The question we used to measure party preference is “Which party would you vote for if a regional election were to be held on Sunday?”

Table 2: Frequency and percentage of party preferences in survey and share of the vote in closest actual elections (n=1753)

	Frequency	Percentage (including)	Share of the vote 2009
CDV	498	23.94	22.86
N-VA	145	6.97	13.06
SP.a	279	13.41	15.27
Open VLD	304	14.62	14.99
Groen!	172	8.27	6.77
Vlaams Belang	177	8.51	15.28
Lijst Dedecker	165	7.93	7.62
SLP	13	0.63	1.09
Other party or missing	327	15.72	3.06

Looking at the results of our survey in comparison with the real election results, we note that for most parties the party preference on the base of the surevy is not too far away from the actual results in the elections. Only two parties differ significantly from the vote share, the VB and the NVA. The voters of the VB are known not to disclose their party affiliation easily. This rightwing party had to change name because they were convicted for racism, and they have been excluded from every from of coalition government by the other parties by the so-called 'cordon sanitaire'. In commercial election surveys that are weighted by party affiliation, usually they have a weight of around 2 or 3. The lower proportion of NVA voters than in the real population is more difficult to explain. In the last election of 2010, this party almost doubled it's vote share. Their main issue is more independence, and thus also more budget and more decisive power for the Flemish regional parliament in the framework of the Belgian federal state. Since the country has been in a number of consecutive crises on some technical issues relating to the constitutional makeup of the country, it could be that the charismatic leader of the NVA won a lot of voters in these turbulent times, giving them an alternative solution to a problem the traditional parties weren't able to solve.

3.3 Network measures

Network analysis has established itself as a field on its own in the last decades. Although we are analysing networks, we are not doing network analysis. This is related to the nature of the data. Where network analysis studies the relations in a closed setting, e.g. a classroom, taking into account the characteristics of the actors, we use a sample from the target population. A second point of interest is that we only have egocentric network measures, which means that we have information about the relation ego has to alters, but not about the relations alters

have. From a network perspective we are missing a key point of information, since we do not know the degree of closure, or in other words if friends know each other. These survey on the other do allow us to make generalisations on the Flemish population and their social networks, which is never possible if one studies complete networks.

To have a look at bonding social ties we investigate the number of friends and family one can discuss personal matters with, and the intensity of these contacts. The amount of bridging social ties is examined by looking at the diversity of one's social circle in cultural, socio-economical and resourcebased terms.

3.3.1 Core network size

Studies show that estimates in surveys for the total network size are unreliable (Killsworth et al., 1990), but experiments teach us that the average total network size is about 125 (Dunbar & Hill, 2003). Since our interest lies in the extent of strong ties, associated with bonding social capital, we are less more interested in the size of the close network, that reflects actual social support, than the total network. We asked the respondents with how many people they talked about personal matters in their family and among their friends, which is a reliable estimate of the size of one's intimate, close social network (Marsden, 1990). The size of the close network can be seen as an indicator for emotional social support (Pugliesi & Shook, 1998), and it is a common measure for core discussion networks (Mollenhorst, Völker & Flap 2008). To avoid outliers and keep the size of the networks realistic, we limited the maximum number of friend and family one talks to about personal matters to 18.

3.3.2 Frequency of contact with the close network

A second aspect of bonding network ties is the frequency of contact. Strong ties form through frequent contact (Homans, 1955), so the frequency of contact with the close network is a second good and reliable indicator of bonding (Marsden, 1989). The indicator for intensity of close network contact is the sum of two items, visiting family and inviting friends. These items had a 6 point scale of frequency ranging from never (0) to several times a week (5).
In our sample the mean frequency of contact was 5.56 with a standard deviation of 2.09, and the median 6, which means on average people visit family and friends a few times a month. We have to keep in mind that we are talking about the closest friends, namely the ones you invite at home, and the family members that are visited.

3.3.3 Identity diversity of wider network

Not only the socio-economic diversity of one's network was mapped, but diversity of one's friend circle in terms of religion, ethnic background, sexual orientation, generation and political ideas was probed in a more direct way.

The exact question wording was: Think about your friends (and not only your best friends). Do you have a friend … ?

With a different religious orientation?

With a different ethnic background?

With a different sexual orientation?

Of a different generation (at least 20 years of difference) ?

With different political ideas?

The respondents were asked to answer with a simple yes or no.

Table 3: Frequencies items network diversity

Items	% yes
With a different religious orientation? (n=2055)	43.26
With a different ethnic background? (n=2074)	38.04
With a different sexual orientation? (n=2072)	44.74
Of a different generation (at least 20 years of difference) ? (n=2075)	52.77
With different political ideas? (n=1972)	72.26

We observe that having a friend with different political ideas is quite frequent, but a friend with a different ethnic background is less common. To identify the structure of the answering patterns, we use item response theory (IRT). Shortly stated IRT states that the score of a respondent on a scale is determined by a latent trait, in this case the diversity of their network. Each item holds a position on the latent trait, with an associated degree of difficulty, a threshold. Every respondent also holds a position on the latent trait. If the position of the respondent on the latent trait is high, but the item has a low difficulty threshold, then the respondent has a high chance of answering positively on the item. In the context of the network diversity scale this means that a respondent with a very diverse network, will probably have people with a different political opinion in his network.

To examine the scale we used mokken scale analysis (Mokken, 1971; Sijtsma & Molenaar, 2002). This is an extension of a guttman scale using probability, which means that the scale can be ordered so that a positive answer on item means that all the previous items were also answered positively with a high propability. For every item and for the total scale an H value is calculated, with reflects the scalability of the item, and the validity of the total scale. The item H should always be higher than .30. If the scale H has a value above .50, the scale is very strong, if it is lower than .40 the scale is very weak. The scale is a moderately strong unidimensional mokken scale , with a scale H of .40.

Table 4: Item and scale characteristics identity diversity (N=1953)

Items (0=no friend, 1= friend)	Scale mean	Item H
People with different political ideas	.72	.50
People of a different generation (at least 20 years of difference)	.53	.32
People with a different sexual orientation	.45	.37
People with a different religious orientation	.43	.42
People with a different ethnic background	.38	.45

ScaleH=.40

Diversity in terms of political ideas seems quite easy to cope with among friends. Knowing people of a different generation is a bit more difficult, but still widespread in the Flemish population. The items about a different sexual and a different religious orientation are very close to each other in terms of difficulty. This may be due to the fact that the religious diversity in Belgium is very limited, with the majority being formally Roman Catholic. Ethnic diversity remains the most difficult item in the scale.

Since the mokken analysis showed us a cumulative unidimensional scale, a cumulative mokken scale ranging from 0 to 5 was constructed. The mean of this scale is 3.22 with a standard deviation of 1.81. This means that on average people in Flanders have friends with a different political opinion, of a different generation and of a different sexual orientation.

3.3.4 Socio-economic diversity of wider network

To measure the linkage of respondents with different social circles in society, we used the position generator. The position generator is an instrument to grasp the ego-centered network of an individual based on the occupations of their network contacts. It was first used in the Albany study (Lin & Dumin, 1986). The version we used is a shortened version (20 items instead of 30), adapted to the Flemish context, of the position generator used in the 1999

survey the social networks of the Dutch (SSND). Their measure was based on earlier research by Boxman et al (1991), Moerbeek (2001), Völker (1995) and Völker & Flap (1999). Tie strength, or if the person having the occupation was either family, a friend or an acquaintance, was not taken into account.

The wording of the question was: “With which occupations do you have contact in daily life? Do you know a ….in your family ? Or among your friends? or acquaintances?

Since in this study we are mainly interested in the diversity of the ties, we will use one of the most simple, straightforward and parsimonious measures derived in the context of social capital from the position generator, namely the number of accessed positions (Van der Gaag, Snijders & Flap, 2003). The respondents in the survey on average had access to 11 occupations through their network, with a standard deviation of 4.33.

3.3.5 Resource diversity of the wider network

Socio-economic diversity of the network on itself is not so useful if you cannot mobilise any resources. The respondent is asked if he can ask someone in his social circle to help him out with a number of both practical, technical and legal issues. This because knowing people in different socio-economical positions does not mean you can actually mobilise their resources. In terms of politics, this gives us a deeper view of the actual diversity of resource one can access through his or her network (Van der gaag, Snijders & Flap 2004). Again we use a simple measure, and make use of a dichotomy: having acces to the resource through the network, or not having access. Using mokken scale analysis, we examined if a cumulative structure was present in the data. Only one item did not load on the resource diversity scale, the item that asked if one knows someone who can repair a car or motorcycle in his network.

Table 5: Frequency and Loevinger H of Resource generator scale item

Item	% yes	Loevinger H
Active in a political party	0.4649	0.40
Can help you find a job	0.6548	0.39
Who can lend you 1000 euro	0.8187	0.33
Knows about financial affairs (taxes, subsidy, ..)	0.8341	0.31
Of whom you can use the car	0.8394	0.35
Who knows how to handle a pc	0.9577	0.49
Who can help you move	0.9764	0.51

Total scale H=.37

Looking at the difficulty of having certain resources, we note that someone to help with practical issues such as moving and ICT is more common than assistance with mobility, assistance with taxes and actual financial assistance. Connections to find a job, or people who are active in politics are the least common resources. All in all the scale has a H of .37 which means it is a valid but rather weak cumulative scale.

Table 6: Correlations of the different network measures (n=1938)

	Size of close network	Intensity of close network contact	Cultural diversity	Socio economic diversity	Resource diversity
Size of close network	1				
Intensity of close network contact	0.2557	1			
Cultural diversity	0.1396	0.1715	1		
Socioeconomic diversity	0.2584	0.2197	0.3337	1	
Resource diversity	0.2312	0.2251	0.232	0.4405	1

We will use these five measures of social networks separately. Every indicator measures a different aspect of the social connectedness. In theory these measures could coincide, but the correlations in table 3 show that this is not the case. As was to be expected, the measures for bridging social networks are related, but clearly measure different aspects that deserve to be analysed apart. Size and frequency of contact of the close social network are positively related, but not very strongly. The correlations between bridging and bonding measurements

are all lower, which demonstrates the validity of the theoretical separation between both concepts.

4. Analysis

A first description of the differences between the contexts of respondents preferring different partners, is given in the table below.

Table 7: Descriptive results of party preference and network indicators

	Socialist Party	Christian Democrats	Extreme Right
Number of good friends	3.2	3	2.2
Number of family members one is close to	4	4.7	3.2
Percentage having friends with different ethnic background	45%	30%	34%
Percentage knowing someone in a politcial party?	45.5%	49.6%	34.5%

Clearly, already on the individual level there are differences between respondents having a different party preference in our sample. Where Christian Democrats have a larger family base to rely on, supporters of the extreme right clearly have a smaller close network in general. Socialist typically have a more diverse network in cultural terms, whereas Christian democrats can acces a wide variety of resources.

To disentangle community level and individual level influences, multilevel logit regressions are used, in a random intercept model. A multilevel model, also named hierarchical model or random effects model, makes it possible to assess community level influences apart from individual level influences. The logit version of multilevel is slightly different from a usual multilevel with a normally distributed response variable, since the variance on the individual level depends on the value of the predictors in the regression, and the usual assumption of homoscedasticity does not hold for logit regression. Looking how much of the total variance is on each level becomes rather difficult because of that. The use of a threshold model is commonly used as an easy way to asses higher level variance. In practice this means we constrain the individual level variance to 1 (Goldstein, Brown & Rasbash, 2002). Two measures of model fit will be used, a basic indicator of model fit, the squared correlation and

a measure more adapted to logit regression, a pseudo R square measure based on the log likelihood.

For the convenience of the reader the B-coefficients have been transformed to odds-ratios, since they are a lot easier to interpret than logit coefficients.

In the analysis we will add variables step by step, starting with a zero multilevel model, that only has a random intercept. By adding information about the social background, the social networks and the municipality of residence, we will try to explain the propensity to support the party over other parties.

Table 8: Logistic Multilevel Analysis of party preference for the Christian Democratic Party versus other parties. (n=1753)

		Christian Democrats			
		1	2	3	4
Demographic background	Age		1.023 ***	1.024 ***	1.025 ***
	Gender (Ref. Male)		1.373 **	1.317 *	1.318 *
	Diploma		0.953 ns	.949 ns	.965 ns
Social networks	Size close network			1.041 **	1.041 **
	Intensity close network			1.061 ns	1.053 ns
	Cultural diversity			.889 **	.906 **
	Socio-economic diversity			1.021 ns	1.015 ns
	Resourse diversity			1.009 ns	1.008 ns
Community level	Urbanity				.915 **
	Migration				1.050 ns
	Density				.780 **
	Economic wellbeing				.897 ns
	Age structure				.941 ns
ICC		0.0533	0.0563	0.0583	0.0175
LL		-1029.07	-990.5	-906.04	-895.77
Squared correlation			.0376	.0506	.0741
Pseudo R squared			.0375	.1196	.1295

Entries are odds ratios of the logistic multilevel regression. Data: SCIF-survey 2009.
Sign.: ns p>=.05 *:p<.05 **:p<.01 ***:p<.001

On the individual level it's clear that especially older or female respondents tend to affiliate with the Christian Democratic party CD&V. Educational attainment does not play a role.

People who support CD&V have a slightly larger close network, but a less culturally diverse network.

A significant influence of the municipality of residence can be noted. It not explained away by the composition of our sample, but mainly by urbanity and density. This means that people living in an urban and densely inhabited environment are less inclined to vote for this rather traditional party. A large share of the municipality level variance is explained away by our community level variables. All in all we can predict the propensity to vote for the Christian Democrats rather well based on demographics, social network characteristics and municipality of residence. Demographics and network indicators seem slightly more important, but overall all three parts add to the puzzle.

Table 9: Logistic Multilevel Analysis of party preference for the Social Democratic Party versus other parties. (n=1753)

		Social Democrats			
		1	2	3	4
Demographic background	Age		.991 *	.992 ns	.992 ns
	Gender		1.170 ns	1.150 ns	1.162 ns
	Diploma		.798 *	.805 *	.819 *
Social networks	Size close network			1.008 ns	1.009 ns
	Intensity close network			1.013 ns	1.014 ns
	Cultural diversity			1.174 **	1.160 **
	Socio-economic diversity			.940 **	.942 **
	Resourse diversity			1.005 ns	1.029 ns
Community level	urbanity				1.071 ***
	migration				1.100 ns
	density				1.024 ns
	economic wellbeing				.748 **
	age structure				.993 ns
icc		0.0562	0.0514	0.0459	0
LL		-759.59	-744.39	-689.74	-678.79
Squared correlation			.0065	.0226	.0445
Pseudo R squared			.0200	.0920	.1064

Entries are odds ratios of the logistic multilevel regression. Data: SCIF-survey 2009.
Sign.: ns p>=.05 *:p<.05 **:p<.01 ***:p<.001

The people who would vote for the centre left SPA are younger and have a lower educational attainment. The age effect also disappears once we include the social network indicators.

Socialdemocrats have a culturally diverse, but socioeconomically more homogenic social network. On the municipality level it's clear that they usually live in a more urban, but less economically affluent environment. All in all, most of the prediction comes from social network indicators and the municipality of residence. Ironically the position in society plays a very modest role in predicting a socialist vote. This can be explained because the party aims at two entirely different audiences, both the higher educated urban population and the traditional workers. Again network indicators contribute most to the pseudo R square, showing that preference for the social democrats is strongly related to heterogeneous networks in terms of identity, but a smaller scope when it comes to access to diverse resources.

Table 10: Logistic Multilevel Analysis of party preference for the Liberal Party versus other parties. (n=1753)

		Liberals			
		1	2	3	4
Demographic background	Age		1.004 ns	1.005 ns	1.005 ns
	Gender		1.015 ns	1.037 ns	1.033 ns
	Diploma		1.225 *	1.229 *	1.215 *
Social networks	Size close network			.973 ns	.973 ns
	Intensity close network			1.014 ns	1.018 ns
	Cultural diversity			.904 *	.900 *
	Socio-economic diversity			1.019 ns	1.020 ns
	Resourse diversity			1.221 *	1.216 *
Community level	urbanity				1.015 ns
	migration				1.013 ns
	density				1.044 ns
	economic wellbeing				1.288 *
	age structure				1.001 ns
Icc		0.0598	0.0582	0.0587	0.0475
LL		-799.35	-789.33	-735.23	-732.47
Squared correlation			.0044	.0137	.0196
Pseudo R square			.0125	.0802	.0837

Entries are odds ratios of the logistic multilevel regression. Data: SCIF-survey 2009.
Sign.: ns p>=.05 *:p<.05 **:p<.01 ***:p<.001

Respondents supporting for the liberal party are clearly higher educated. Furthermore they have more homogenous networks in cultural terms, but access to a high variety of resources. In this regard their profile is the opposite of socialists. Furthermore, they tend to live more in

economically well-off municipalities. All in all, the network indicators seem to contribute most to the model.

Table 11: Logistic Multilevel Analysis of party preference for the Extreme Right versus other parties. (n=1753)

		Extreme right			
		1	2	3	4
Demographic background	Age		.988 **	.982 **	.983 **
	Gender		.820 ns	.808 ns	.821 ns
	Diploma		.543 ***	.665 **	.679 **
Social networks	Size close network			.916 ***	.917 ***
	Intensity close network			1.011 ns	1.006 ns
	Cultural diversity			.969 ns	.965 ns
	Socio-economic diversity			.978 ns	.978 ns
	Resourse diversity			.816 **	.829 *
Community level	urbanity				1.022 ns
	migration				1.057 ns
	density				.917 ns
	economic wellbeing				.782 *
	age structure				1.066 ns
Icc		0.0212	0.0074	0	0
LL		-572.91	-549.85	-505.27	-502.14
Squared correlation			.0192	.0398	.0434
Pseudo R squared			.0403	.1181	.1235

Entries are odds ratios of the logistic multilevel regression. Data: SCIF-survey 2009.
Sign.: ns p>=.05 *:p<.05 **:p<.01 ***:p<.001

The supporters of the extreme rightwing VB are younger and especially less educated than the average voter. The odds to vote for VB are about twice as high if you have a lower educational attainment. It seems supporters of the extreme right have a smaller close network, and they can't acces a large variety of resources in their wider network. Oddly enough, they do not have a less culturally diverse network. Including network measures also diminishes the influence of educational attainment, which points out the importance of the social environment for political choices. Another feature of VB voters is that there does not seem to be a large higher level influence. This is rather remarkable, since it was the case for the other preferences we studied on the one hand, and because we would expect a higher sensitivity for their anti-immigrant message in environments with more immigration. This is clearly not the

case. This points out that supporting the extreme right mainly can be explained by social background and social network indicators.

5. Conclusions

This analysis illustrates that party preference does not depend on ideas alone, but that social structures such as socio-demographic background, the social networks one is embedded in and the kind of municipality where one lives play a significant and sometimes underestimated role. The typical supporter of the Christian Democratic Party, is a bit older, female, has a large close network to rely on, does not know so many people who are different from herself, and tends to live in a more rural, quiet municipality. For Social democrats, this is not the case. They tend to be younger and lower educated, have a diverse network in terms of cultural differences, but their networks do not span all of the social layers in society. Supporters of the Socialists also tend to live in more urban and less economically well-off municipalities. People who would vote for the Liberal party are highly educated, but do not have a very diverse network in cultural terms. They typically have access to a wide variety of resources, which illustrates their entrepreneurial spirit. Liberal Supporters tend to live in richer municipalities. The supporters of the extreme right have a distinct demographical profile which has already been pointed out several times: they are younger and lower educated. The analysis of our findings regarding their networks is rather enlighting and can be considered new. First of all, they do not seem to have a less diverse network than the average inhabitant, as is sometimes stated in contact-theories on ethnocentrism. Secondly the network indicators on which they do differ from the rest of the population are rather important. They tend to have a smaller close network, which illustrates social isolation and lack of emotional support. Furthermore, they do not have access to diverse resources through their network, which points out that the social isolation is not only of an emotional, but also of a practical nature.

All in all we can say that party preference can be predicted moderately well, without taking personal attitudes into account. The models have an acceptable model fit, and especially indicators of one's social network seem to yield more insight into the differences between supporters of different parties. Preference for the Christian democrats depends most on demographic background, while, social network indicators add around 7% of explained variance for about every party. The municipality of residence is again most relevant for the Christian democrats.

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7. Appendix

Rotated Factor Matrix

	Factor Urbanity	Population Mobility	Population density	Economic Wellbeing	Ageing of the population
Number of Active Firms	**,980**	,046	,144	-,060	,029
Total Population	**,969**	,060	,182	-,085	,004
number of available infrastructures (culture)	**,967**	,049	,134	-,066	,065
Number of self-employed persons in main profession	**,966**	,051	,143	-,038	,064
Number of employees in the tertiary sector	**,960**	,080	,192	-,069	,007
Number of employees in the public sector	**,941**	,073	,173	-,081	,017
Total foreigners rate per 1000 inhabitants	,042	**,949**	,112	-,074	-,120
External Immigration Rate	,141	**,938**	,059	-,065	-,070
External Emigration Rate	,019	**,931**	,082	,133	-,020
Population Density	,200	,084	**,913**	,066	,073
Percentage of built surface	,058	,045	**,873**	,172	-,031
Percentage of industries and port surface	,383	,055	**,738**	-,077	,048
Crime Rate	,376	,241	**,570**	-,165	,248
Interquartile Coefficient	-,046	,062	-,027	**,909**	,014
Mean Income	-,069	,079	,207	**,879**	-,015
Unemployment Rate	,214	,384	,117	**-,614**	,187
Mean Age	,031	-,119	,036	-,051	**,947**
Rate of retired people over active population	,051	-,052	,095	-,035	**,891**
Eigenvalue	7.136	2.980	2.483	2.139	1.514

Principal Factor Analysis with Varimax rotation